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PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF EVENTS IN THE  
WAR OF THE REBELLION,  
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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# SERVICES WITH COLORED TROOPS

IN

## BURNSIDE'S CORPS.

BY

JAMES H. RICKARD,

[Late Captain 19th U. S. Colored Troops.]

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PROVIDENCE:

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## SERVICE WITH COLORED TROOPS IN BURNSIDE'S CORPS.

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PERHAPS the most important event that hastened the success of the Union cause was the decision to use the negroes as soldiers. It was an experiment that caused the most sagacious statesmen to hesitate long before agreeing to it. The idea of arming negro slaves, who had long been servile beings to our enemies in the field, was an untried thing, and might overwhelm us with disaster should they prove unmanageable while occupying an important position in our lines. One great obstacle to overcome would be the prejudice of our soldiers against serving on equal footing with black soldiers ; this was so deep seated as to be dangerous to the experiment. Then the hatred of the South would be doubly embittered against us.

The first experiment was to use them as secondary—to do fatigue 'duty at less pay, the law reading "that such persons (slaves) of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States, to garrison forts, position stations and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service."

General Hunter declared the slaves free in Fort Pulaski, and on Cockspur Island, Ga., April 12, 1862, and on May 9th the slaves in Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina, which action was annulled by President Lincoln ten days later. Neither he, nor Grant, nor Sherman, nor Stanton, nor Adjutant-General Thomas were favorable to their use except as hirelings. The exigencies of the war, however, forced the enlistment of negro troops on the government, and the first to be enlisted was the First South Carolina Regiment, the last part of May, 1862.

It will be surprising, even to many old soldiers, to know that at least 186,097 black soldiers, mostly ex-slaves, fought for the United States government, and that 36,847 of this number (nearly twenty

per cent.) were either killed or died in United States hospitals. That they took part in 449 engagements, and for soldierly bearing and heroism challenge comparison with their more fortunate white comrades.

The old soldiers of the Army of the Potomac and the politicians were slow to endorse them and to accept them as comrades and soldiers, but the report of Gen. W F Smith on the fighting of General Hincks's division of colored troops, in the assault on the defences of Petersburg, Va., June 15, 1864, shows *that* was now accorded them. He says: "This day's work is one of the grandest of the war. It will make the old Army of the Potomac open wide its eyes. The earthworks, so successfully carried, are regarded as the most formidable the army has encountered so far during the present campaign. The success has a peculiar value and significance from the thorough test it has given of the efficiency of negro troops. Their losses were heavy. In the thickest of the fight and under the most trying circumstances, they never flinched. The old Army of the Potomac, so long prejudiced



and so obstinately heretical on this subject, stands amazed as they look at the works captured by negroes, and are loud and unreserved in their praise."

At the breaking out of the civil war I had just engaged in business for myself. I was very patriotic, and had talked a great deal and very strongly to those in the community where I lived, and many of the young men were hanging back for me. I could not enter the army without making a great sacrifice, still I was anxious to take a part. I could have had commissions in two different regiments, but declined, as I could not see my way clear to leave my business. I was in Providence when General Burnside left for the front with the First Rhode Island Regiment, and the impulse was strong to go with him. After waiting until August, 1862, without making any arrangements or notifying my family, I drove to Thompson, Conn., where Munroe C. Nichols, the principal of the academy, was recruiting a company, and enlisted. This company, and in fact nearly the whole regiment (the Eighteenth Connecticut) were young men, graduates of the

academies of the eastern part of the State, and a large proportion of them school teachers.

After serving nearly two years in this regiment, I made application to be examined for a position with colored troops, which were now being organized, and was ordered to Washington, before the board of which General Casey was chairman, for examination, and was commissioned by President Abraham Lincoln captain in the Nineteenth Regiment United States Colored Troops, March 12, 1864, and was ordered to report to Colonel Bowman at Baltimore, Md., for muster. The regiment, which had been recruited mostly from the eastern shore of Maryland, and composed entirely of slaves, was rendezvoused there and making final preparations to take the field. The officers had been assigned and rapid progress had been made in drill and discipline.

Soon after joining my regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Perkins, in command, obtained permission to take the regiment up the Shenandoah Valley recruiting. Arrived at Harper's Ferry, with much difficulty we obtained a four-mule baggage wagon and started up the Valley for Winchester.

Col. Perkins was a peculiar individual, and seemed bent on making some kind of a demonstration with his regiment of colored men. When about half way from Berryville to Winchester our advance guard were fired upon, and returned the fire; for a moment some confusion prevailed, as it was expected we were intercepted by a rebel force. After forming line to the left of the road in a rocky piece of woods, an officer was sent forward to ascertain the cause of the firing. It was found that a company of our scouts, dressed in grey, had opened fire on our men to see how they would stand. Our men returned the fire and did not flinch. One colored man was struck on the forehead by a minie ball, and a piece of his skull as large as a silver half dollar knocked out, but it did not knock him down. He was assisted by his comrades, and when the wagon came up he was put in, and when after several days we returned, he was sent to the hospital, and came back healed, and did good service afterward. Our expedition continued to Winchester, where the colonel intended to pass the night, but having served in this valley previously and knowing

the danger of remaining there, I prevailed upon him to move on to Bunker Hill, where we might be within supporting distance from Martinsburg should we be attacked; and I had information that a superior mounted force of the enemy were near.

On the way to Bunker Hill that night we met about eight hundred of our cavalry passing up the valley from Martinsburg; they were attacked the next morning and entirely routed, proving the wisdom of my insisting that we move on and not stop over night there with our small force of less than 750 men, untrained and untried.

From Martinsburg we passed over into Maryland to Shepardstown and back to Harper's Ferry. I was then ordered to proceed with my company to Charlestown with three days rations, and "recruit vigorously" My men had only five rounds of ammunition. I asked for forty and was refused. I went under protest, as I knew that with less than one hundred colored men, ten miles away from any assistance, with only five rounds of ammunition, it was a foolhardy adventure, as Mosby with his guerillas was scouring that country continually, and

there were probably more Confederate soldiers in Charlestown at that time, well armed, than my company numbered. It was a cold stormy night, about the first of April, when I arrived there. I quartered my men in a church, situated on the south of a square, the country to the south of the church being open toward a knoll where John Brown was hung. After seeing that the men were comfortably cared for, I found quarters near by in a cottage. The woman, whose husband was in the rebel army, was violently loyal to the Confederate cause. After much bantering and my offer to pay, I got a good supper, and a feather bed on the floor in front of a good fire. I was very anxious, and placed four or five pickets out and a sentinel in front of my door, with orders to report to me immediately any noise like the tramp of cavalry. I was just getting into a doze, between one and two o'clock. The sentinel knocked on the door and said, "I hear cavalry." Having removed only my sword and boots, I was outside in an instant. I could hear the heavy tramp of a large force of horsemen apparently entering the place from the northwest. I had the men quietly

aroused, and knapsacks packed without lights, and held a hasty consultation with my lieutenant (Raymore) and decided that "discretion was the better part of valor." It was raining and intensely dark. I moved down the macadamized pike towards Harper's Ferry, where if attacked I might be within reach of assistance if necessary. We continued our march about four miles, when we reached a cavalry vidette, thrown out from Harper's Ferry. I ascertained from him that a force of cavalry of our own troops had gone up the valley on a reconnoitering expedition, and on account of the muddy condition of the roads had gone up the road to the north, and entered the place from the northwest. Knowing now that there were troops between me and the enemy I was relieved of my anxiety, retraced my steps, and went back to the same quarters and slept soundly.

The negroes had become scared and kept out of sight, as the report had spread that we were pressing them into the service. In a few days the regiment returned to Baltimore without any recruits.

About the 20th day of April, 1864, we were ordered to embark on boats and proceed to Annapolis,

Md. The impression made by these troops was voiced as follows by the *Baltimore American* the day of our departure: "The three regiments of colored troops recruited in this city and State, nearly three thousand men, under the auspices of Colonel Bowman, made a dress parade through our streets this morning previous to their departure for the scene of—it is to be hoped—active operations. No man desiring the speedy overthrow of the rebellion, and its proper termination, could have looked upon the spectacle with other than feelings of satisfaction. Only one of the regiments was armed (the Nineteenth), the other two were fully equipped except arms. A splendid brass band was on the right of the line, and a full drum corps accompanied each regiment. The men all marched proudly and soldierly, and nothing could have been more perfect than their movement, evidencing a great deal of care in their management and drill. Magnificent working and fighting material was in that column. Sturdy, stalwart, able-bodied and healthy men, well disciplined by careful training, proud of their new and novel position, they looked every inch the sol-

dier. A few years ago the man who would have said that the negro would have marched through the streets of Baltimore in military equipments and unarmed without being assaulted, would have been considered a fit candidate for a lunatic asylum. But such is the case, and during their march this morning it was pleasant to see, as the head of the column passed the Maryland Institute, where the arrangements for the fair are in progress, that they were lustily cheered. In many places along the route of march, flags were waved from the stateliest or from the humblest dwellings. Several of the men were accompanied to the point of embarkation, the foot of Long Dock, by their wives and sisters, and many were the leave-takings there witnessed. Some of the more rabid of the rebels in our midst gave vent to their spleen in silent murmurs and 'curses not loud but deep.' One female, who was standing at the Institute as the procession turned down the market space, thought it had come to a pretty pass when she had to stand to allow 'niggers' to pass, and that they were a nice crowd to send to fight white men. But notwithstanding the grievances of the



fair secesh, the troops passed quietly by, amid the congratulations of those who think the United States government can rightly use the colored man for a soldier or a laborer, as well as the rebel oligarchy at Richmond. May we have many more such regiments to credit to the quota of Maryland, as those that passed the *American* office this morning.”

From Annapolis we marched to Washington. When we arrived at the outskirts of the city we halted, and after an hour of busy work, had removed most of the mud, brasses were polished and shoes blacked, so that notwithstanding it had rained hard most of the way from Annapolis, we made quite a presentable appearance.

We now passed through the city in column, and were reviewed by President Lincoln and General Burnside from the steps of Willard's Hotel. Accoutered, as we were, with a full complement of clothing, etc., and the day being very warm, the march from outside the city until across Long Bridge, without a stop and with cadenced step, was very trying, but not a man left the ranks until the bridge was passed. We now found we were to join the Ninth

Corps, which was marching to join the Army of the Potomac. We arrived at the Rapidan River on the morning of the first day's fight in the Wilderness. We immediately crossed a pontoon bridge and relieved a part of the Sixth Corps, who had been heavily engaged. Our position was now on the extreme right of the Army of the Potomac, just above Germania Ford, where we and all the army crossed, and that night our regiment was on the picket line with the rebs in sight in our front. About two o'clock the next morning the Ninth Corps was ordered to fall back and move to the left; the aide, with the orders for our division, either lost his way or for some other reason, did not reach us until after the time we were to move; orders then had to be sent to the different brigades and by them to the regiments, and the pickets withdrawn, which took some time. Before we could move the three other divisions had fallen back and moved to the left, leaving us entirely cut off. It was a race for life as we moved down that plank road through the thick pine forest, and the enemy trying to cut us off, but we passed behind the right of our army, which was being thrown back to the river much lower down.

Our division was now assigned as rear guard of the whole army. I had charge of a portion of our rear picket line one night as we were passing from the Wilderness to the James river, and had my headquarters near a house of considerable pretensions, surrounded by numerous outbuildings, some with straw-thatched roofs. There were several ladies, inmates of the house. The boys in hunting about the premises discovered a trunk filled with the ladies' effects; they were on the watch, and came rushing to me to save it for them. I had it carried to the house, and by this time another was discovered in some bushes by a fence. I told them if they had got anything else hidden they better point it out, and I would have it carried in for them; they went with me and pointed out several trunks and boxes. They said they supposed we would ransack their house and had taken this precaution to save their valuables. I told them we did not molest non-combatants, and they and their house would be perfectly secure as long as they behaved.

Just as we were packing to move in the morning, fire broke out in a straw stack near some of the

buildings with thatched roofs, and was soon communicated to them. The fire no doubt caught from fire used by the men in getting their breakfast. Although the army had moved and we were risking not only ourselves but the safety of the train, we stopped and saved the house from destruction. The next day I saw a Richmond paper, and the most scathing language possible was used, heaping abuse on the heads of ourselves (the colored troops) for destroying private property and assaulting defenceless females, reciting not one word of truth, except that there was a fire. Of course this was for a purpose, to embitter the feeling against us, which was now about as violent as could be.

During our march from the Rapidan and through the various battles until we crossed the James River and commenced the siege of Petersburg and Richmond, our division acted as a rear guard and especial guard of our trains. There were in the Wilderness campaign probably not less than four thousand army wagons, which, extended in a straight line, would have reached from Washington to Richmond, a distance of one hundred and thirty miles. Besides the

three days rations in haversack, the fresh beef was taken along on the hoof to last till reaching our new base of supplies at White House Landing, supposed to last for sixteen days, and driven in corps herds.

I shall never forget a sight I beheld the next morning. The cattle for the Ninth Corps were herded in a valley a mile or two in diameter, and they completely filled it, and at sunrise it was a magnificent sight as I beheld them from an eminence near by. Before crossing the James they were all eaten. This gives something of an idea what it took to supply provisions for such an army

We had several attacks, one in the night at Spottsylvania, when the enemy's cavalry made a dash into our regiment, and for a time it looked as though we might lose some of our supplies.

The day after the battle of Cold Harbor my regiment went to White Horse Landing as a guard to the train of ambulances, wagons and teams of all descriptions, carrying the wounded there to be shipped north on steamers. It was thirteen miles from the battlefield to the Landing, and all day and all night a continuous line of teams loaded with wounded

made a procession probably never equalled. In almost every wagon some died before reaching the river. The number wounded was so great no care could be bestowed upon them until they could be taken to some place where they could be treated. There were not ambulances enough for the emergency, and the baggage wagons had to be used.

The roads were very rough ; it was a most pitiful situation, the shrieks and groans of the men, as the wheels would strike stumps or sink suddenly into holes in the deep ruts which had been formed. It was necessary to have a strong guard all the way with the teams, to prevent surprise and capture of the trains.

We were the last to cross the James River, and were attacked by cavalry with a light battery as the last regiments were crossing the pontoon bridge ; but a battery from our side was quickly run into position, and they skedaddled double quick.

A delay here of Hancock's Corps for provisions gave General Beauregard time to cross the Appomattox and retake the strong works captured that day by General Hincks's division of colored troops in front of Petersburg.

The firing in our front now grew louder and more severe. As we pressed on through the pine woods aides were riding fast with orders to keep ranks well closed up, no straggling, etc., etc., as we expected in a few moments to become engaged, but when we arrived it was too late, as the works were retaken and held by a strong force.

As an illustration of the severe discipline of these troops, I will relate an incident that occurred at this time, when a terrible engagement seemed imminent. A major of one of our regiments was taken suddenly sick, and got off his horse and into an ambulance. Gen. H. G. Thomas, who commanded a brigade, heard of the occurrence and suspected it was cowardice, and sent his surgeon to examine him; he reported that he was perfectly well. The general then had him examined by several surgeons, who failed to find him suffering from any illness. He immediately assembled a drumhead court-martial, had charges preferred against him for cowardice in presence of the enemy; he was found guilty, and sentenced to be dishonorably dismissed the service of the United States, to forfeit all pay and allowance

then due or that might become due him ; to have his insignia of rank and his buttons torn from his clothes ; his sword broken in presence of the division, and be drummed out of camp, and be imprisoned at the Dry Tortugas at hard labor during the remainder of his term of service. He was placed on an old cart, drawn by a mule, the division formed in hollow square, and to the tune of the "Rogue's March" he was drummed out of camp, and I understood the sentence was carried out in full. He learned it was an unfortunate time to be taken sick, at the opening of a battle.

Arrived in front of Petersburg, we took our position in line with the other troops of the Army of the Potomac. The service there was very severe, especially so for the officers, many being absent sick or on detached service, so that those present had to do double duty. A considerable part of the line was under fire continuously, day and night. The pickets kept up a constant fire, which at times would increase to a roar, then a cannon would open on one side or the other, to be followed by others, until all the artillery on both sides would be engaged. The



line was so close that mortars could be used, making havoc behind our breastworks, so that at the most advanced positions bomb-proofs were necessary for protection. During such an engagement a mortar shell fell nearly in front of a little bomb-proof I occupied and rolled into it ; there wasn't room for us both, I thought, so I seized it and threw it over the breastworks before it exploded.

Perhaps the most trying place for a soldier is on such a picket line as extended in front of our army at Petersburg and Richmond during 1864 and 1865, which was almost an intrenched position itself, the pits being within a few feet of each other and containing three men each, with, in many places, quite a stretch of slashed timber between them and our breastworks, and this line was to be held, if possible, against any force intended to capture it. Add to these conditions that the men were constantly under fire, day and night, and one can see that it required as much nerve to go on the picket line for twenty-four hours as to go into a general engagement, and in fact I have seen as hard battles there as when whole armies were engaged, which were never re-

corded. Perhaps an attempt was made to capture our picket line; the firing would increase from a steady desultory firing to a continued roar, then the artillery from both sides would open fire, each side thinking that the enemy was coming in force, making the position almost untenable. And these places were now occupied in turn by black and white soldiers, even the most critical and dangerous ones, showing the confidence now felt in these troops. I have many times seen these men in such situations, and never saw them flinch or fail to do their whole duty as soldiers.

General Burnside presented a plan to break the enemy's lines by mining a fort in front of Petersburg in their line of intrenchments and blowing it up, which met the approval of General Meade and General Grant. The plan was that when the explosion took place the assault was to be led by the colored division, who were to press through the breach and through the enemy's second line of works on to Cemetery Hill, to be followed by another division of the Ninth Corps, who were to wheel to the right and carry a formidable fort in the rear; the next division

following to wheel to left and take a similar fort a short distance in that direction, the whole army to follow through the opening, and the battle then fought in the rear of their works with their army cut in two. Had the plan been followed no doubt the war would have been ended on that day

During the night of July 29, 1864, we were massed in a valley immediately in rear of the position to be assaulted, together with a large part of the army, and cannon were placed in every position possible to play upon their works at this part of the line. The order had been changed in the night, putting General Ledlie's First Division in front. We were terribly disappointed. We had expected we were to lead the assault, and had been for several weeks drilling our men with this idea in view, particular attention being paid to charging. Only the day before, our regiment was drilled by Major Rockwood in forming double column and charging, which was witnessed by many officers and men of the army. Major Rockwood was killed the next day while charging their second line of works. Both our officers and men were much disappointed,

as it was an opportunity to show what they could do, and there was not an officer but would have staked everything that we would break through their lines and go on to Cemetery Hill, as proposed.

When all preparations were made, we lay down for a little sleep, and were awakened shortly after daylight by the explosion and the terrible discharge of cannon, that made the ground tremble as by an earthquake.

The First Division only went as far as the "crater" and stopped, and it was nearly an hour before the colored troops were ordered in, having been standing crowded in the covered ways leading up to the breastworks; but it was now too late, as their second line of works was full of men, brought up from each flank, and our men were not only exposed to the terrible musketry fire in front, but to an enfilading fire of shell, grape and canister that no troops could withstand, and the charge was made through a line of white troops going to the rear. The slaughter was terrible. Out of fifty-three men of my company reported for duty that morning, ten were killed and many wounded, some of whom died

in a few days. There were very few general officers on the field beyond our breastworks, and I saw only one, General Hartranft, and I assisted him in getting one of the rebel cannon, which was loaded but dismounted, up on a ridge of earth at the "crater," and fired it at them. This seemed for the instant to concentrate their fire, if possible, at this point more intensely, and men fell by hundreds in the "crater."

About two o'clock in the afternoon they charged in on our flank at the "crater," and there was a rush of what was left alive for our breastworks, and I think I made good time. A short time before this several officers of my regiment stood partly sheltered by a huge lump of earth that had been rolled out by the explosion, as large as a small room, when a ten-inch mortar shell fell and buried itself in the sand in close proximity, exploded, covering us with dirt and sand. Captain Blakeley said to Captain Fletcher, a very tall Yankee from New Hampshire, who was spitting the sand out of his mouth and wiping it from his eyes, "What's the matter, Fletcher?" "Don't you like it?" "Yes," he said, "I like it well enough, and it tastes well enough, but I don't know

how long I am going to live, and I don't want to wear my teeth all out chewing sand." This was at a time when shot and shell were concentrated on this place, and men were being torn and mangled by the hundred every moment. He was a brave and cool man in action, and a very good officer at all times. My second lieutenant, Raymor, was reported killed, but was captured, as we found out several weeks afterward. Lieutenant Dobbs of our regiment was also captured. When the captured officers were taken to the rear they were formed in line, and their names and regiments were taken down. None gave their regiment as one of the colored regiments, but from some of the white ones known to have been in the engagement, as it had been supposed that they would be executed according to an order issued by the Confederate government, if it was known who they were. Dobbs was indignant, and when they came to him he said, "Lemuel D. Dobbs, Nineteenth Niggers, by ——." They took him by the hand, and said they honored him for his frankness, and showed him more consideration than those whom they thought had lied. No man dodged his position after that.

We attempted under a flag of truce to remove the wounded and bury the dead immediately after the failure to break through their lines, but they would not recognize a flag of truce, and all the rest of that day and night and the next day the wounded lay on the field in the fierce blazing sun, screaming for relief which we could not render, and most of them died. On the second day arrangements were made for a cessation of firing and the burying of the dead, who by this time had become a swollen and putrifying mass, unrecognizable. Long, deep trenches were dug, and by rolling them in blankets the dead were laid in these trenches, several bodies deep. The stench was almost unendurable even after burial, as so much blood covered the ground.

Our brigade commander, General Thomas, got too far on the rebel side during the truce, and they held him and took him blindfolded to Petersburg, but returned him the next day, as they had overstepped in making a capture during a truce.

Of the fighting of these troops at Petersburg, Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, the great secretary of war, wrote: "The hardest fighting was done by the

black troops. The forts they stormed were the worst of all."

The world's standard of heroism is the "Spartan Greeks at Thermopalse," but the assault of colored troops at the "crater," and the assault and capture of Fort Harrison at New Market Heights without firing a gun (the caps having been taken from the guns) using bayonets only, where General Butler says he counted five hundred and forty-three black heroes dead in a space not three hundred yards long, challenge Greek, Roman, or any other heroism. These regiments of blacks, fighting with bayonets on the ramparts of the fort at Milliken's Bend and successfully bayonetting back Gen. Henry McCullough's rebel division, is a record that cannot be smirched with sneers or prejudiced injustice.

The charge of Ferrero's division at the "crater" at Petersburg, Va., through a broken and demoralized division of white troops, then forming line inside the enemy's works, and temporary capture of their interior works, with awful losses in killed, wounded and *murdered*, is a record to win back the previously prejudiced judgment of the president,



cabinet, generals, and officers of the Army of the Potomac, who up to this time had thought negroes all right for service in a menial capacity, but from henceforth to take responsible places, like the right flank of the army at Deep Bottom, Va., and the storming of strong works like forts Alexander and Gregg.

Gen. H. G. Thomas, who commanded a brigade of colored troops at Petersburg says: "I lost in all thirty-six officers and eight hundred seventy-seven men; total, nine hundred and thirteen. The Twenty-third Regiment entered at the charge with eighteen officers, it came out with seven. The Twenty-eighth entered with eleven officers, it came out with four. The Thirty-first had but two officers for duty that night. Confederate Gen. Bushrod Johnson says that the troops that met this charge were the first brigade of Mahone's Division, with the Twenty-fifth and Forty-ninth North Carolina, and the Twenty-sixth and part of the Seventeenth South Carolina Regiments. It was no discredit to what was left of these regiments that they were repulsed by a force like that.

" Finally, about 7.30 A. M. we got the order for the colored division to charge. My brigade followed Siegfried's at the double-quick. Arrived at the "crater," a part of the first brigade entered; the "crater" was already too full, that I could easily see. I swung my column to the right. The pits were different from any in our own lines—a labyrinth of bomb-proofs and magazines, with passages between. My brigade moved gallantly on right over the bomb-proofs and over the men of the first division. As we mounted the pits, a deadly enfilade from eight guns on our right and a deadly cross-fire decimated us. Among the officers the first to fall was the gallant Fessenden of the Twenty-third Regiment. Ayres and Woodruff of the Thirty-first dropped, killed within a few yards of Fessenden. Liscomb of the Twenty-third fell to rise no more, and then Hackiser of the Twenty-eighth, and Flint and Aiken of the Twenty-ninth. Major Rockwood of the Nineteenth then mounted the crest, and fell back dead with a cheer on his lips. Nor were these all, for at this time hundreds of heroes "carved in ebony" fell. These black men commanded the admiration of

every beholder on that day. The most advantageous point for the purpose having been reached, we leaped from the works and endeavored to make a rush for the crest."

He says of the death of his aide, Lieutenant Pennell of the Nineteenth Regiment: "Capt. Marshal L. Dempsey and Lieut. Christopher Pennell of my staff, and four white orderlies with the brigade guidon, accompanied me, closely followed by Lieut.-Col. Ross leading the Thirty-first Regiment. At the instant of reaching the works, Ross was shot down, the next officer in rank, Captain Wright, was shot as he stooped over him. The men were largely without leaders, and their organization was destroyed. Two of my four orderlies were wounded, one flag in hand, the remaining two sought shelter, when, Lieutenant Pennell, rescuing the guidon, hastened down the line outside the pits, with his sword uplifted in his right hand and the banner in his left, he sought to call out the men along the whole line of the parapet. In a moment a musketry fire was focussed upon him individually, whirling him round several times before he fell. Of commanding figure,

his bravery was so conspicuous, that according to Colonel Weld's testimony a number of his (Weld's) men were shot, because, spell-bound, they forgot their own shelter in watching the superb boy, who was the only son of an old Massachusetts clergyman, and to me was as Jonathan was to David. Two days later with a flag of truce I searched in vain for his body. He was doubtless shot literally to pieces, for the leaden hail poured incessantly for a long time about that spot, and he probably sleeps among the unknown whom we buried in the long deep trenches we dug that day "

The changing of the arrangements during the night before the charge at Petersburg whereby General Ledlie's division was substituted for the colored division to lead the assault, no doubt was the cause of the failure of the Union forces to cut the rebel army in two and have ended the war at that time.

General Grant said in his evidence before the committee on the conduct of the war, " General Burnside wanted to put his colored division in front, and I believe if he had done so it would have been

a success. Still I agreed with General Meade as to his objection to that plan. General Meade said, 'If we put the colored troops in front (we had only one division) and it should prove a failure, it would then be said, and very properly, that we were shoving these people ahead to get killed, because we did not care anything about them. But that cannot be said if we put white troops in front.'"

Had the colored troops led the assault, their subsequent attack proved they would have led the way clear through the enemy's entire line, on to Cemetery Hill, and the other troops would have followed, and the awful slaughter by an enfilading fire at the "crater" been prevented, and the fight would have been in the rear of the enemy's works, with their army cut in twain.

The rebel General Forrest unwittingly contributed, perhaps, to the successes of colored troops, but hereafter let no man say that black troops, led by graduates of Harvard and Yale, and the sons of the first families of the North, will not fight.

One night our regiment was detailed for picket duty, and relieved some troops nearly in front of

"Fort Hell." The ground between the two armies at this place was covered with slashed timber, which made it almost impassable. I had been on duty the day before as brigade officer of the day, and therefore did not accompany the regiment. About eleven o'clock Captain Fletcher, the senior captain on duty, who had charge of that portion of the picket line, sent word to General Ferrero that he needed more officers, as at many places the lines were very close, and the firing had increased since he went on the line. I was ordered, together with Captain Pitts, and a young lieutenant who had reported for duty but the day before (being the only officers left in the regiment) to report immediately to Captain Fletcher on the picket line. He sent Captain Pitts to an exposed place on the line at an angle. There was a house a few yards in front, from which sharpshooters picked off our men. The lieutenant was very anxious to be sent where he could see some fighting, and was sent in with Captain Pitts. I was sent to take charge of the left half of the line occupied by our regiment. About noon the next day I moved down to the centre of the line where Captain

Fletcher was. We had only been in conversation a moment when the little lieutenant came rushing from the post, saying, "Captain Pitts is killed! Captain Pitts is killed!" He was engaged in firing at the sharpshooters in the house. The men would load and he would fire, and he had been doing so for some time. A sharpshooter had climbed a tree a little distance from the line, and the angle brought the captain's head in view from his position in the tree, and he shot him through the head. His body was brought out, and the lieutenant who was so anxious the night previous to get into a dangerous place was entirely satisfied.

For deeds of personal daring and heroism that came under my observation, I saw none that excelled what I saw among colored troops.

In the line of works in front of Petersburg during the siege, the picket line in front of a certain fort was crowded back so close to our works by the rebel picket line that it was very uncomfortable and dangerous for the gunner's in the fort. A colored sergeant conceived the project of extending our picket line farther to the front, by capturing a portion of

their picket line. Accordingly, one dark night, with the detail in his charge, he dashed through their line, doubled them up for a considerable distance, capturing many prisoners, and establishing our line much more advanced than before, and maintained his ground. The line thus established was held until the capture of Petersburg and Richmond. This bold undertaking resulted in making life in the fort and along the line at that place much more safe and less arduous, a feat a general officer might have been proud to have planned and executed.

The last of December, 1864, we left our quarters, which were the sixth we had erected for the winter, and marched to join the Twenty-fifth Corps in the Army of the James, General Weitzel commanding. After a long march through rain and snow, plodding along all day in deep slush and mud, from a position on the extreme left of our army near Hatcher's Run, being thoroughly soaked and besmeared with mud to above the knees, we arrived at a place in our lines at Bermuda Hundred after dark. The weather had changed to extreme cold, so that our clothing became frozen stiff. Our regiment was detailed for



picket, and relieved some white troops, who had a tacit understanding with the enemy not to fire on each other's relief when changing. This was in the night, and at daylight we stood facing the rebels, only a few rods apart. They were evidently angry at being confronted by negroes, and to some of the conversation of the officers replies were made that boded trouble. There was no firing at this part of the line by the pickets, but I anticipated there would be. Suddenly, at the sound of a trumpet, the firing commenced with a yell and a charge. Taken by surprise so suddenly, the first impulse was to seek shelter in the slashed timber in our rear, but in a moment the officers rallied them and drove back the rebels, who were of Pickett's division (made memorable by their charge at Gettysburg), in strong force, and held our position during the day under an incessant fire. Many were killed by the first volley, as they were standing without cover, not expecting such a cowardly attack, and to my mind showed that they were good material for soldiers, and had perfect confidence in their officers. As is well known, it is hard to control men when brought unexpectedly

under fire. Men become used to danger gradually, and can control themselves much easier after being some time under fire.

General Butler commanded the Army of the James at this time, and all appointments in the colored troops were mustered at his headquarters. All the officers who obtained commissions in these troops had to pass a thorough examination by a board organized for that purpose.

A young man went before the board, was examined, and given a second lieutenancy, and was ordered to report to General Butler for muster. He had been a good soldier in the ranks, but was green as to the etiquette existing among officers. General Butler was exacting in this respect, and much of an autocrat. His headquarters were laid out with precision, his tent flanked on either side by his staff, according to rank. Instead of reporting to his adjutant general or commissary of musters, he inquired which General Butler's tent was, and walked in without knocking. Butler sat reading. On hearing some one enter, he cocked that eye up toward him, but said nothing. The soldier said he had been

ordered to report to him to be mustered, but before he was mustered he wanted to ask a few questions, and proceeded to do so, Butler meanwhile remaining silent. When he got through Butler said, "Young man, when you die and go to heaven, I hope you won't mistake the throne of grace for an intelligence office."

The last charge at Appomattox was by the black brigades of Generals Doubleday and William Birney, and the last man killed was Captain Falconer, of the Forty-first United States colored troops.

Although General Forrest coldly murdered three-fourths of the garrison at Fort Pillow, making "Fort Pillow" the war cry of the colored troops, there is no record to show that the murders at Petersburg and Fort Pillow were retaliated by the negro soldiers. General Hincks's division of colored troops captured over three hundred prisoners in one assault, and many of these rebels are still alive through the magnanimity of their former slaves. Gen. James B. Steadman, in reporting his action at the battle of Nashville, says: "The largest part of the losses, amounting to fully twenty-five per cent. of the men

of my command who went into the action, fell on my colored troops, and I was unable to discover that color made any difference in the fighting of my command."

One chivalric southern captain gave as a reason for the rebels fleeing before the colored troops, "that we could not expect the sons of southern gentlemen to fight 'niggers.'" After such fighting of 186,097 men they earned free American citizenship for themselves and their race forever.



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